

*How Is Your
School District
Performing?*



A look at
**Erving School
Union 28**

2004–2006



EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL
Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Erving School Union 28 Public Schools, Joan Wickman; the school department staff; and the town officials of Erving School Union 28.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?	
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results	3
WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?	
Overall District Management	7
Leadership, Governance, and Communication	8
Curriculum and Instruction	10
Assessment and Program Evaluation	12
Human Resource Management and Professional Development	14
Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support	16
Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency	18
CONCLUSION	20
APPENDIX A:	
EQA's District Examination Process	22
APPENDIX B:	
Glossary of Terms Used in EQA Technical Reports	23
APPENDIX C:	
State and Local Funding, 1998–2006	24

INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

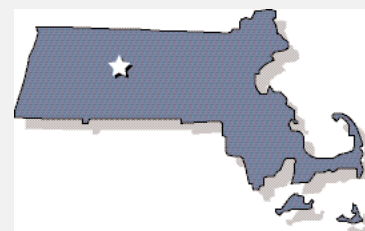
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

In May 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Erving School Union 28 for the period of 2004–2006. The Union is comprised of the Erving, Leverett, New Salem-Wendell, and Shutesbury school districts. The EQA analyzed Erving School Union 28 students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in subgroups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Erving School Union 28 Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2006. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Erving School Union 28, MA



DISTRICT

Population: 6,855

Lowest: New Salem 929

Highest: Shutesbury 1,810

Median family income:

Ranged from \$47,212 (Erving)

To \$73,333 (Leverett)

Largest sources of employment:

Educational, health, and social services;
manufacturing and retail trade

Local government: Board of Selectmen,
Town Administrator, Open Town Meeting

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 15 members total

Number of schools: 4

Student-teacher ratio: 12.1 to 1

Per Pupil Expenditures:

Erving: \$12,251

Leverett: \$12,384

New Salem-Wendell: 11,734

Shutesbury \$12,427

Student enrollment:

Total: 662

White: 87.3 percent

Hispanic: 5.3 percent

African-American: 0.2 percent

Asian: 2.0 percent

Native American: 0.6 percent

Limited English proficient:

0.0 percent

Low income: 17.8 percent

Special education: 14.5 percent

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census and Massachusetts Department of Education.

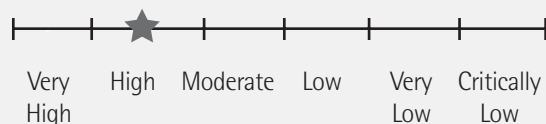
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

After reviewing this report, the Educational Management Audit Council voted to accept its findings at its meeting on October 24, 2007.

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	80	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	85	84
Math Proficiency Index	76	72

Performance Rating



The Average Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and subgroups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA, math, and STE, eligible students in Erving School Union 28 participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

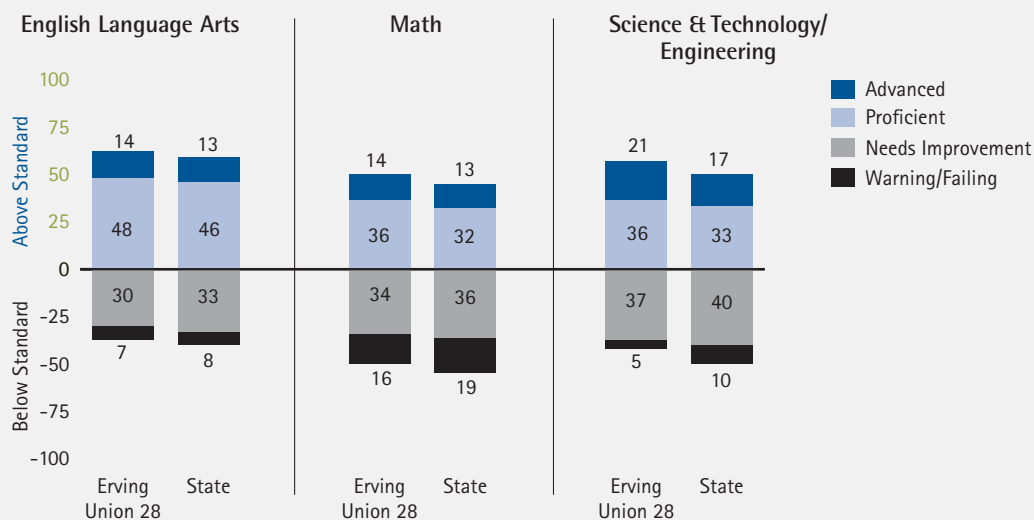
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, more than half of all students in Erving School Union 28 attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, more than that of K–6 students statewide. More than three-fifths of Erving School Union 28 students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), half of Erving School Union 28 students attained proficiency in math, and more than half of Erving School Union 28 students attained proficiency in science and technology/engineering (STE).

- Erving School Union 28's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 80 proficiency index (PI) points, two PI points greater than that statewide for grades K–6. Erving School Union 28's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 20 PI points.
- In 2006, Erving School Union 28's proficiency gap in ELA was 15 PI points, two PI points narrower than the state's average proficiency gap in ELA for grades K–6. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of nearly two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Erving School Union 28's proficiency gap in math was 24 PI points in 2006, three

ERVING SCHOOL UNION 28 SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



PI points narrower than the state's K-6 average proficiency gap in math. This gap would require an average improvement of three PI points per year to achieve AYP. Erving School Union 28's proficiency gap in STE was 17 PI points, five PI points narrower than that statewide.

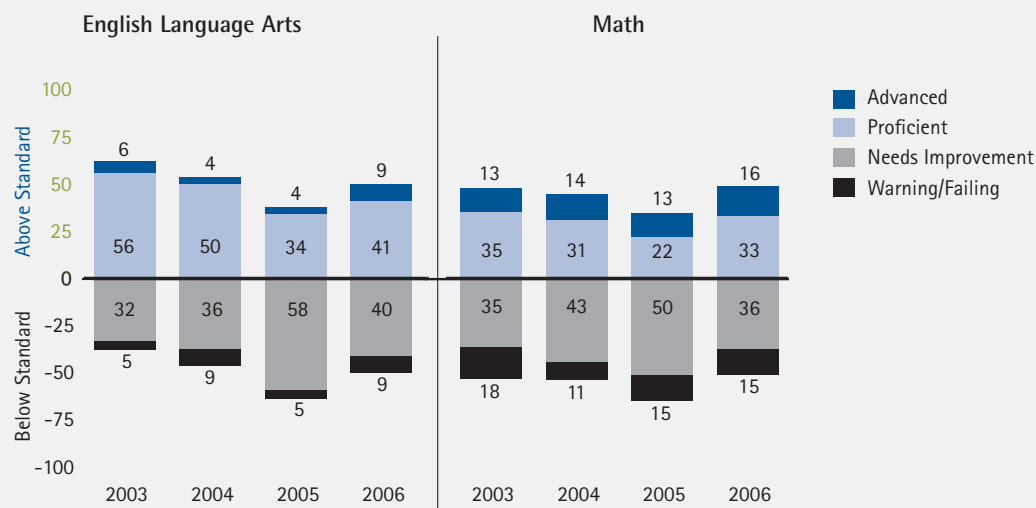
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Erving School Union 28's MCAS performance showed a slight decline overall, a decline in ELA and in STE, and slight improvement in math.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories fell by two percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by one percentage point. The average proficiency gap in Erving School Union 28 was 23 PI points in both 2003 and 2006.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, ELA performance in Erving School Union 28 showed a decline, at an average of two PI points annually.
- Math performance in Erving School Union 28 showed slight improvement over this period, at an average of less than one-half PI point annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of five percent, a rate lower than that required to meet AYP.
- Between 2004 and 2006, Erving School Union 28 had a decline in STE performance, decreasing by approximately four PI points annually over the two-year period.

ERVING SCHOOL UNION 28 ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



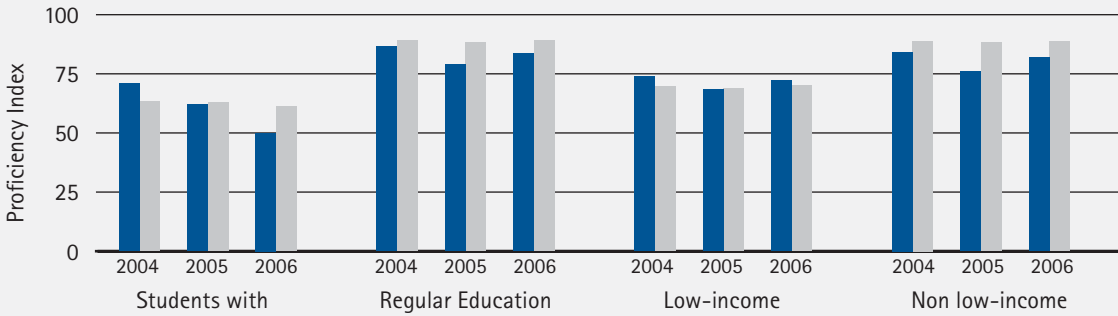
4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied among subgroups of Erving School Union 28 students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Erving School Union 28 in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 17 PI points in ELA (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 21 PI points in math (male students and regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

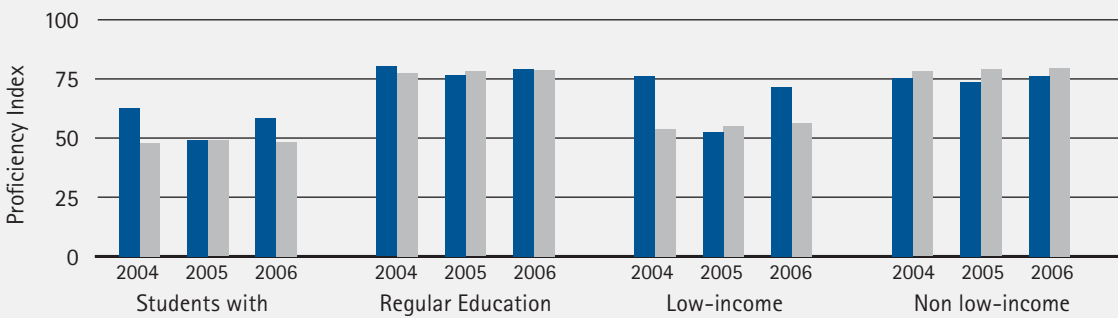
- The proficiency gaps in Erving School Union 28 in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch program). Less than one-third of students with disabilities and less than half of low-income students attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and non low-income students. Roughly three-fifths of the students in each subgroup attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for male students was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for female students was narrower than the district average in ELA but wider in math. For both subgroups, more than half the students attained proficiency.

ERVING SCHOOL UNION 28 STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES

English Language Arts



Math



Erving Union 28

State Average

5. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?

In Erving School Union 28, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 25 PI points in 2003 to 34 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math narrowed from 24 to 21 PI points during this period.

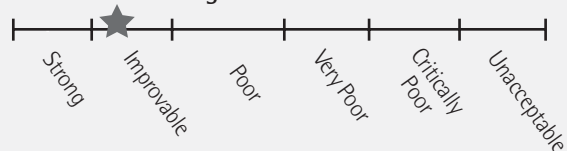
- All student subgroups in Erving School Union 28 had a decline in performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The subgroup with the greatest decline in ELA was students with disabilities.
- In math, all subgroups in Erving School Union 28 with the exception of non low-income students showed improved performance between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was low-income students.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 67 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Erving School Union 28 received the following rating:

Performance Rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

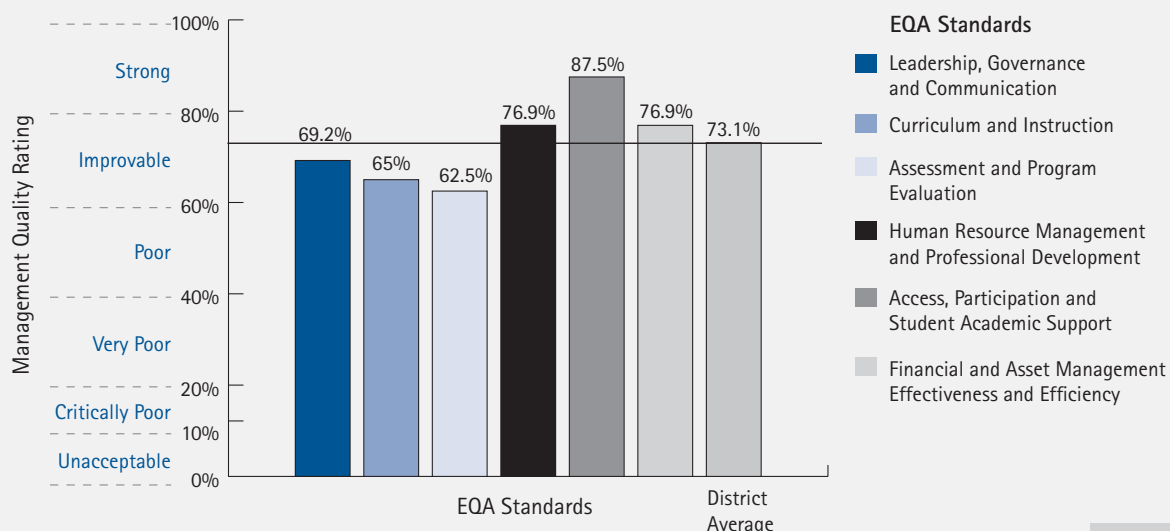
Overall District Management

To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 67 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness – or quality – of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2006, Erving School Union 28 received an overall MQI score of 'Improvable' (73.1 percent). The district performed best on the Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support standard, scoring 'Strong!' It was rated 'Improvable' on the Assessment and Program Evaluation standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing as expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance declined in ELA but improved slightly in math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Leverett, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. As measured by MCAS test performance, Erving School Union 28 ranked among the 'High' performing school districts in the commonwealth, with scores that were 'High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math.

Leadership and Communication

The Erving School Union 28's administrative team consists of a superintendent, a business assistant to the superintendent, and a special education director. Each school has a principal. Each school district in the union has its own school committee, and representatives from each school committee serve on the Union 28 School Committee (15 members total).

During the period under review, Erving School Union 28 had two superintendents: the former interim superintendent and the former superintendent. For school year 2006-2007, the Union school committee hired a new superintendent subsequent to the retirement of the former superintendent. The four districts had fragmented systems of monitoring student achievement; however, the former superintendent began and the current superintendent continued to focus each district on improving student achievement by monitoring student academic progress and analyzing achievement data and sharing them with the teachers.

Also during the period under review, turnover occurred in all five local school committees, as well as the Union school committee. While the committees did not have formal mentoring programs in place, veteran members reported offering support to new members. The superintendent met with newly elected school committee members prior to their first meeting to review committee operations and their roles as policymakers and student advocates. Each district school committee as well as the Union

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Erving School Union 28 received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The school committees, administrative staff, and town officials worked together to ensure strong communication and promote the importance of a strong education for each student.
- During the latter part of the period under review, the four districts began to use various sources of achievement data to aid in the development of programs to meet the needs of their students.
- The districts all had safety plans in place that were reviewed annually with the police and fire departments.

Areas for Improvement

- The union school committee evaluated the superintendent in place during the review period only during the 2004-2005 school year.
- The members of each of the five local school committees received training and understood their responsibilities, but did not have plans to mentor new members and did not use student achievement data on a regular basis to make decisions.
- The four districts that constitute the Erving School Union 28 did not have District Improvement Plans (DIPs) for the entire period under review and used annual, non-standards-based School Improvement Plans.

school committee had a subcommittee for budget and personnel. While the examiners found some evidence that the school committees had reviewed, added, and updated some policies, many policies had dates of 1970. District school committee members interviewed stated they began the process of reviewing policies during the final year of the period under review and it was their intention to continue the process. The Union school committee began to look at policies that would cover all four districts in an effort to bring policy uniformity to the Union.

Planning and Governance

The district school committees, the superintendent, and town officials continued to focus on a collaborative culture to ensure that the districts met the needs of all students. The school committees and the town select boards and finance committees met on a regular basis to review the budget needs of both the communities and the schools prior to the adoption of final budgets. School personnel and school committee members interviewed stated that parents and members of the community became very involved with their schools and advocated for and supported the efforts of the staff and administration.

Both the former superintendent and the current superintendent stated that three of four of the Union's districts began to develop District Improvement Plans (DIPs) during the final year of the period under review. In addition, the former superintendent began the process of developing a Union DIP, and the current superintendent updated the document. Both superintendents stated that the Union school committee embraced the Union DIP but never formally voted to accept it. All four districts had school committee-approved, non-standards-based School Improvement Plans (SIPs) in place for all of the years under review, and the review of each SIP took place on an annual basis. During this time, the SIP served as the DIP for each district. During the final year of the period under review, the districts of Erving, Shutesbury, and New Salem-Wendell began the process of developing DIPs, although they did not align with the Union DIP; Leverett began developing a DIP in 2006-2007. Analysis of student performance on the MCAS tests varied from district to district, and no formal Union system or structure was in place for the analysis of student assessment results. Each district analyzed student data for content and looked at individual scores due to the smallness of each district. The examiners found limited evidence of any structures in place in the districts to look at subgroup achievement data or to share and analyze the data gathered.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Erving School Union 28 Public Schools needed improvement in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

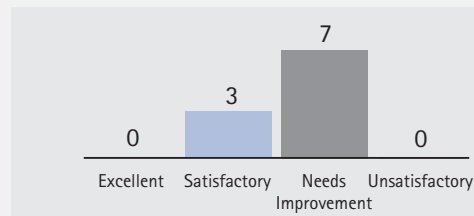
During the period under review, the four independent elementary school districts that make up Erving School Union 28 began the process of aligning, documenting, monitoring, and communicating curricula in the core tested areas. Horizontal alignment was a school-based initiative, not a Union-based one. Some vertical alignment existed across grades within the schools and between two of the districts and their receiving middle schools. Documents reviewed and interviews conducted by examiners revealed that the curriculum documents lacked uniform timelines, resources, instructional strategies, and measurable outcomes, and only listed general assessments.

All the districts in the Union allotted time weekly for staff to work on curriculum and, according to interviewees, administrators planned for Job Alike meetings in 2007-2008 so that teachers at the same grade level throughout the Union could come together to plan strategies to improve teaching and learning. Each district used different instructional programs for math, ELA, and science. While the districts did not have standards-based report cards, one school had performance indicators on its report cards. Some of the districts were just beginning revisions to their curricula, according to documents reviewed and interviews conducted.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Erving School Union 28 received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The principals served as the curriculum leaders in their respective buildings; they were beginning to provide active support for techniques and methods grounded in research to improve achievement of all students.
- Each of the districts had documented curriculum guides.
- The districts had just begun to align the curriculum horizontally within a grade and vertically within a building. The Erving and Leverett districts had begun to meet informally with their receiving middle schools to further align curricula vertically.

Areas for Improvement

- None of the districts had a regular, timely review cycle for their curricula in the tested core content areas.
- Curriculum guides needed supplements including more resources, instructional standards, articulation maps, assessments, and regular review cycles.
- Allocation of instructional time in the tested core content areas to focus on improving proficiency of all students was inconsistent across the districts.
- The availability of technology was uneven and inconsistent within the districts.

Effective Instruction

The principal in each school served as the instructional and curriculum leader. According to interviewees, the principals conducted daily walk-throughs, with some more formalized than others. The Union did not have a standardized walk-through protocol. The principals conducted contractual evaluations and were working to introduce differentiated instruction, heightened accountability, and technology integrated into instruction, according to interviews and random classroom observations. Principals, in their roles as curriculum leaders, actively monitored teachers' instruction for practices that reflected high expectations.

Inconsistent amounts of time were allocated to the tested core subjects as found in documents reviewed and random classroom observations. According to observations of randomly selected classrooms, the districts averaged a high rate of positive indicators for classroom management and climate. They had an average rate of positive indicators for instructional practices, high expectations, and student activity and behavior. Each school provided an after-school program for homework and/or extracurricular activities.

During the period under review, the staffs in all districts were beginning to use weekly professional development time to analyze the MCAS and other assessment scores and to adjust instruction. According to interviewees, staff ability in all districts was emerging in this area and more staff members were receiving training to conduct data analysis and to use the information to improve teaching and learning for all students. Student achievement data were not yet used to choose or modify the instructional programs used. Staff members conducted some item analysis and they made improvements to their respective curricula, such as more emphasis on open-response questions in both math and ELA and improvement in teaching of number facts. According to interviewees, the focus during most of the period under review was on qualitative data, or how well students and staff liked a program, rather than on quantitative data, or how well the students improved using a program.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Student Assessment

For each of the years under review, the Erving School Union 28 MCAS test data were collected and analyzed at the district level by principals and teachers. The results were also compiled at the Union level. Neither the districts nor the Union had a formal structure in place for analyzing student achievement data. Some teachers and administrators were trained in TestWiz, but training was spotty and was the result of individual teacher experience with TestWiz outside of the Union rather than any coordinated, systemic professional development within the Union. Three of the four principals had yet to be trained in TestWiz; their training was planned for 2007-2008. Use of student achievement data to drive decision-making was an emerging practice throughout the Union.

Each of the districts used a variety of formative and summative assessments in addition to the MCAS tests. All districts used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), but the use of the TerraNova, the Stanford 9, the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and the Gates-MacGinitie test, among others, varied by school district. More formative and summative testing was provided to assess students in ELA than in math. Only the New Salem-Wendell district had a standards-based report card issued to students. The report cards of the other three districts were not standards based and were not aligned to the state frameworks and benchmarks. They all varied in their degree of inclusion of quantitative data.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Erving School Union 28 received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Each district administered a wide range of assessments to measure student progress across all grade levels.
- The Title I program for the union effectively used a range of assessments to monitor student achievement, inform program decision-making, and evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instructional practices.
- During the period under review, all four districts within the union collected, analyzed, and disseminated the MCAS data to staff, parents, and community members.

Areas for Improvement

- The use of student achievement data varied from district to district and teacher to teacher.
- The districts did not use student achievement data to maximize staff effectiveness, prioritize goals, or allocate resources in a systemized and structured manner.
- Student report cards varied across the districts; only New Salem-Wendell had a standards-based report card.

Interviews with administrators and faculty members revealed that teachers regularly evaluated curriculum and instructional practices. Most of the analysis was qualitative in nature and most of the decision-making was consensus driven. Decision-making about programming was mostly determined by community input and the budget. For example, the New Salem-Wendell SIP identified effective instruction of gifted students as a goal. Parents, administrators, and community members confirmed this during interviews. However, a review of data indicated that none of the grade 4 or grade 5 students and only a single grade 6 student scored in the 'Advanced' category in ELA on the 2006 MCAS tests. In math, 15 percent of the grade 4 and 17 percent of the grade 5 and 6 students scored in the 'Advanced' category.

Program Evaluation

During the period under review, the curriculum and instructional practices varied across the districts. Administrators reported and a review of documents confirmed few formal policies or practices in place for using student achievement data to evaluate programs or services despite the use of many formative and summative assessments. With the exception of the Title I program, district and Union leadership did not routinely use program evaluation results to initiate, modify, or discontinue programs and services. The leadership and faculty of each district both stated that the schools were small enough and they knew the students well enough that most analysis was done on an individual student basis.

The allocation of staff was not based on student need but on discussions between the principal and staff. In addition, the districts did not regularly engage in internal or external audits to determine program effectiveness. Although the New Salem-Wendell district had evaluated its implementation of the Everyday Math program, the evaluation did not include quantitative data to support its findings. However, the Union did undergo a DOE Coordinated Program Review (CPR) which it used to set internal goals for the special education department.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

The districts and Union had procedures in place for the hiring of teachers and administrators, and advertised vacancies in area newspapers. The new superintendent enhanced the hiring procedures, building on those in place in the four districts, and requested that principals recommend two or three candidates to her for interviews, after which she would consult with the principal. Most of the time the superintendent would honor the principal's choice, but the final decision rested with the superintendent. Principals had the final hiring authority for non-professional staff in their buildings. The districts formed committees when hiring teachers and the Union had hiring committees when hiring administrators. The districts provided licensure data to the EQA that showed teachers in all districts held the appropriate licensure; however, the Union hired two unlicensed principals during the period under review. The Union and the principals monitored the progress of teachers toward certification or recertification.

Professional Development

The districts had professional development and mentoring programs during the period under review. The mentoring programs were two-year programs, and all new teachers in the districts had trained mentors, although the districts hired few teach-

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Erving School Union 28 received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The four districts provided and funded professional development programs for staff and a mentoring program for new teachers.
- The districts and the union had hiring practices and procedures in place for teachers and administrators and applied for waivers to the DOE for uncertified staff.
- All four districts had school crisis and/or safety policies, procedures and practices, and safety committees.

Areas for Improvement

- Some of the district crisis and/or safety plans were under review and in a draft format, which limited organized staff emergency and safety training.
- No district performed all teacher evaluations in compliance with the education reform statute.
- The superintendent did not evaluate administrators annually during the period under review.

ers during the period under review. Teachers and their mentors worked together to plan curriculum and lessons and observed one another's classrooms. No formal mentoring program existed for administrators but the new superintendent indicated that she informally mentored principals.

The districts had two Union-wide professional development days, and all the districts had 70-percent days every Wednesday to conduct a variety of activities including professional development. A review of the professional development plans as well as information provided by interviewees showed that analysis of student achievement data and program implementation informed professional development, for the most part. In addition, the districts spent a great deal of professional development time on curriculum development. Offerings were not provided for staff to learn or enhance data analysis skills. Each teacher was required to have an individual professional development plan (IPDP) created in collaboration with his/her respective principal. Although limited promotional opportunities existed in the districts because of their small size, teacher retention was not an issue.

Not all administrators received training in Research for Better Teaching (RBT) evaluation methods, although observing teachers in the classroom was the principal method of active supervision. Administrators in all districts performed formal and informal classroom observations to monitor classroom instruction and the implementation of professional development, but the districts did not have protocols for the observations.

Evaluation

The districts did not hold administrators or teachers accountable for student achievement. While principals conducted classroom observations, the Union did not comply with M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 38 that described evaluation requirements. Districts conducted some timely summative evaluations but not for all staff members. Most of the evaluations were instructive, but did not include recommendations for improvement. The superintendent did not conduct annual evaluations of all administrators in accordance with Chapter 71, Section 38; however, administrators indicated they developed annual goals with the superintendent and discussed progress toward them.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

Services

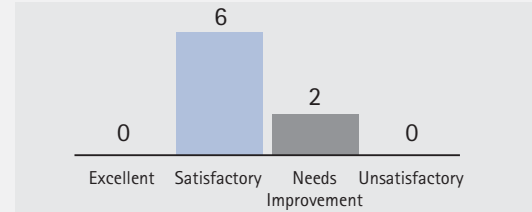
Erving School Union 28 offered Title I support services to all of its students requiring additional support at the schools in Erving, New Salem-Wendell, and Shutesbury. Leverett was not eligible for Title I grant assistance, and the district funded an essential skills teacher whose mission was to provide similar support services to students scoring at or near the 50th percentile on the DIBELS. The Erving school district provided an MCAS test support class for students during spring 2007 in response to the Erving Elementary School's failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). In addition, Erving provided additional academic time through the elimination of a school recess period in spite of parental disapproval. Leverett provided an after-school homework program funded by parents. Shutesbury offered a similar after-school program, staffed by parents and community members, which provided drama activities and a chess club in addition to a place to do homework. The New Salem-Wendell district had an after-school science program and offered after-school help in mathematics.

The special education director organized special education services across the Union. Every special education student was provided with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) with measurable goals, and the progress of these students was monitored at the district and Union levels. Very few homeless students were enrolled in the districts, but the principal in each district served as the homeless coordinator. The districts provided transportation services and were able to provide additional services if needed.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Erving School Union 28 received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Districts in the union had multiple support programs in place to help students requiring assistance attain proficiency on the grade 4 MCAS ELA test.
- Each district within the Union had fair and equitable policies and practices in place to encourage students to accept responsibility and treat others well, and to reduce discipline referrals in the school buildings.
- Transition practices across the union were uniform and efficient, and ensured that all students transitioned smoothly from grade to grade and school to school.

Areas for Improvement

- The districts in the union were slow and late to adopt the use of student achievement data to measure the effectiveness of learning and to define the need for and the effectiveness of support programs.

The size of the four districts comprising Erving School Union 28 made the concept of subgroups less meaningful than in a larger district. In each district, the population at each grade level was generally fewer than 20 students. The only subgroups that were large enough to measure were students receiving special education services and/or free or reduced-cost lunch. Students in both groups participated in all appropriate assessments at the same rate as students in the general population – virtually 100 percent. The performance gap between regular education and students with disabilities in both ELA and math in Erving exceeded the state averages. The gaps were smaller than the state averages in Leverett, Shutesbury, and New Salem-Wendell. The main program for accelerated students was at the Swift River School, which allowed students to skip a grade if their academic progress was exemplary.

Attendance

Both students and faculty within the Union maintained very high rates of school attendance. As reported to the DOE, student attendance over the three-year period under review ranged from a low of 93.4 percent to a high of 95.8 percent across the four districts. These numbers compared favorably with the state target of 95 percent, and closely approached or exceeded that target in all cases. Administrators were able to keep track of student attendance easily because of the small size of the districts. Faculty attendance, according to figures supplied to the EQA examiners by the four districts, exceeded 95 percent in Erving, New Salem-Wendell, and Shutesbury and was 93.8 percent in Leverett.

Discipline and Dropout Prevention

The levels of student retention were less than two percent in all districts in the Union. At least two of the districts reported using the Second Step program as a tool to assist in improving school discipline, but all of the districts reported few incidents requiring disciplinary intervention on the part of administrators.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well maintained.

Budget Process

Erving School Union 28 and its member districts all had open budget processes. The Union administration first developed the Union budget. Each of the four districts that comprised the Union contributed toward the Union budget based on student enrollment. Each district school committee, in collaboration with administrators, developed the budget with input from the staff and the community. Some examples were provided to the EQA examiners of the use of data to make budgetary decisions, such as for new textbooks or instructional programs. Overall, however, data did not play a large role in budget development during the period under review.

Staff, technology, and other instructional resources were adequate in each district, according to interviewees. The New Salem-Wendell school district did make budget reductions to meet the financial ability of the two towns to contribute to the regional elementary school budget. Interviewees noted that resources were less adequate in New Salem-Wendell than in the other districts.

During period under review, the districts did not have access to the Union accounting system and had separate financial records. The Union business office reconciled with each school district on a monthly basis. The Union planned to update its accounting system to a web-based version so all districts could access it.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Erving School Union 28 received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The budget process was open and participatory, but the use of student achievement data in budget development was just beginning in the districts.
- Each community in Erving School Union 28 contributed above the minimum required local contribution, and resources were adequate throughout the union.
- The school districts in the union had internal controls to ensure adherence to procurement laws and proper payroll procedures.

Areas for Improvement

- Reporting of financial information to the school committees was minimal; only financial exceptions were reported.
- The use of an evaluation-based review process to determine program effectiveness was limited in all districts. Some review was conducted of the cost of school lunch programs.
- Though each school district had safety plans, procedures were not consistent and districts varied in their degree of safety regarding locked doors.

Financial Support

The financial support from the communities for each district in the Union was adequate, according to interviewees. For the period under review, each community contributed above the minimum required local contribution, and each district exceeded its required net school spending for each year of the review period. In the New Salem-Wendell district, each community at times supported the district above the regional agreement amount by contributing additional revenue when the other community had a shortfall. The districts and the Union had adequate financial controls to ensure proper procedures for purchasing and the processing of payroll. The districts only reported financial information to the school committees when financial exceptions occurred.

Facilities and Safety

The facilities in the school districts were clean, well-lit, and well-maintained. The buildings were conducive to education. Each community had a capital plan that included some school-related projects. These projects focused on such items as roof repairs and capital equipment purchases. All four elementary schools were renovated since their original construction. Each school district had safety plans; however, each school had varying degrees of safety relative to access to the school. Each school's main entrance was unlocked. Only one school district had cameras. The main offices of the schools did not permit staff to view visitors entering the buildings. The communities had ongoing debates regarding the level of safety and security they wanted in each school.

CONCLUSION

The Erving School Union 28 Public Schools was considered to be a 'High' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'Very High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math during the review period as measured by the MCAS tests. More than half of Erving School Union 28's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Improvable,' with the highest rating in Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support, and the lowest in Assessment and Program Evaluation.

Six school committees, one for each of the five towns and one for the Union, govern the school Union and the four districts. A superintendent leads the Union and each district has a school principal. Authority is bifurcated, and given the school Union's structure, the superintendent's authority to standardize procedures and programs across all districts is limited. Districts value their autonomy to make decisions for their schools and students. While a Union improvement plan, or Union DIP, had been developed, it had not been formally adopted. Some of the districts began creating DIPs, but those documents did not align with the foundations of the Union DIP. The districts varied in their curriculum documents, instructional programs, and use of formative and summative assessments.

The Union central office has a limited staff, which includes a special education director and an assistant to the superintendent for business. Each district is assessed a fee for the operation of the Union central office. For the most part, the school Union and the districts have received adequate financial resources from the communities to operate the schools and provide a sound education to the students, although resources were less adequate in New Salem-Wendell than in the other districts.

During the period under review, the four school districts began the process of aligning, documenting, monitoring, and communicating curricula in the core tested areas. Horizontal alignment was a school-based initiative, not a Union-based one. Some vertical alignment existed across grades within the schools and between two of the districts and their receiving middle schools. Each district used different instructional programs for ELA, math, and science.

Neither the districts nor the Union had a formal structure in place for analyzing student achievement data. The four districts had fragmented systems of monitoring student achievement; however, the former superintendent began and the current superintendent continued

to focus each district on improving student achievement by monitoring student academic progress and analyzing achievement data and sharing them with the teachers. The use of quantitative data to drive decision-making was only in the beginning stages across the Union. Each of the districts used a variety of formative and summative assessments in addition to the MCAS tests. All districts used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), but the use of the TerraNova, the Stanford 9, the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and the Gates-MacGinitie test, among others, varied by school district. Despite the use of assessments in addition to the MCAS tests in the districts, programmatic, resource, and staffing decisions were often the result of discussion and consensus, as well as budgetary impact, rather than the analysis of student achievement data.

EQA examiners found the climate of the schools to be uniformly warm and welcoming, and the students, parents, and teachers all reported a sense of pride and ownership in the schools. Given the small size of each of the towns, the schools are at the center of the communities and parochial. While aware of the security problems associated with schools, resistance was observed by the EQA examiners, albeit at different levels, in each of the districts regarding locking doors and having updated security systems. Although the Union is located in rural Massachusetts, it is not far from major highways and large cities and towns nor insulated from issues associated with school security.

Both teachers and administrators in the district were not evaluated according to the requirements of the Education Reform Act. The principals in each school did supervise instruction through formal and informal walk-throughs, but the Union had not developed a standardized protocol for these walk-throughs. All teachers in the Union held the appropriate licensure. Professional development time focused mostly on curriculum development.

Throughout the districts, teachers consistently reported knowing their students extremely well and being familiar with all students within their respective buildings. The intimacy of these small schools led to a lack of formal systems or structures for analysis of student achievement. Rather, it supported a culture of analysis of individual student academic progress, and a focus more on qualitative than quantitative data.

The district school committees, the superintendent, and town officials continued to focus on a collaborative culture to ensure that the districts met the needs of all students. School personnel and school committee members interviewed stated that parents and members of the community became very involved with their schools and advocated for and supported the efforts of the staff and administration.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

Based on the MCAS results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a site review. Still other districts – those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education – received an even more detailed review.

Data-Driven Assessment

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on MCAS?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Standards-Based Examination

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a site review. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

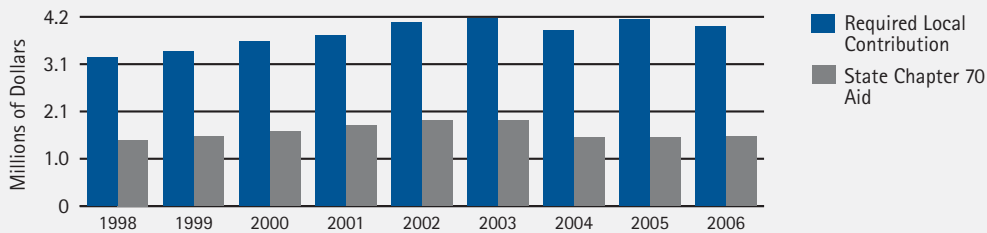
APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis**ADA:** Average Daily Attendance**ALT:** MCAS Alternative Assessment**API:** Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)**ATA:** Accountability and Targeted Assistance**AYP:** Adequate Yearly Progress**CAP:** Corrective Action Plan**CBM:** Curriculum-Based Measures**CD:** Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates**CMP:** Connected Math Program**CORI:** Criminal Offender Record Information**CPI:** Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)**CPR:** Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE**CRT:** Criterion-Referenced Test**CSR:** Comprehensive School Reform**DCAP:** District Curriculum Accommodation Plan**DIBELS:** Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills**DIP:** District Improvement Plan**DOE:** Department of Education**DPDP:** District Professional Development Plan**DRA:** Developmental Reading Assessment**ELA:** English Language Arts**ELL:** English Language Learners**EPI:** English Language Arts Proficiency Index**ESL:** English as a Second Language**FLNE:** First Language Not English**FRL/N:** Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No**FRL/Y:** Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes**FTE:** Full-Time Equivalent**FY:** Fiscal Year**Gap Analysis:** A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency**GASB:** Government Accounting Standards Board**GMADE:** Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation**GRADE:** Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation**GRADU:** The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry**IEP:** Individualized Education Program**Improvement Gap:** A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time**IPDP:** Individual Professional Development Plan**IRIP:** Individual Reading Improvement Plan**ISSP:** Individual Student Success Plan**LASW:** Looking at Student Work**LEP:** Limited English Proficient**MASBO:** Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials**MASC:** Massachusetts Association of School Committees**MASS:** Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents**MAVA:** Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators**MCAS:** Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System**MCAS-Alt:** Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency**MCPPPO:** Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official**MELA-O:** Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral**MEPA:** Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment**MPI:** Math Proficiency Index**MQI:** Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system**MUNIS:** Municipal Information System**NAEYC:** National Association for the Education of Young Children**NCLB:** No Child Left Behind**NEASC:** New England Association of Schools and Colleges**NRT:** Norm-Referenced Test**NSBA:** National School Boards Association**NSS:** Net School Spending**Performance Gap:** A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district**PI:** Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency**PIM:** Performance Improvement Management**POA:** Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process**Proficiency Gap:** A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency**QRI:** Qualitative Reading Inventory**Rate of Improvement:** The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap**SAT:** A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders**SEI:** Sheltered English Immersion**SIMS:** Student Information Management System**SIOP:** Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol**SIP:** School Improvement Plan**SPED:** Special Education**STE:** Science and Technology/Engineering**TerraNova:** K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program – the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The chart below shows the amount of Erving School Union 28's funding derived from the state and the amount that the towns were required to contribute. The four districts combined exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased for Erving from \$2,445,969 to \$2,653,864, for Leverett from \$1,511,121 to \$1,687,631; and for Shutesbury from \$1,531,543 to \$1,727,311; for New Salem-Wendell it decreased from \$1,443,183 to \$1,443,112. Chapter 70 aid increased for Erving from \$245,334 to \$257,384, for Leverett from \$217,431 to \$223,181, for New Salem-Wendell from \$595,315 to \$602,215, and for Shutesbury from \$458,403 to \$465,653. The required local contribution increased for Erving from \$1,350,316 to \$1,696,174; it decreased for Leverett from \$1,140,140 to \$973,857, for New Salem-Wendell from \$631,633 to \$579,782, and for Shutesbury from \$774,777 to \$744,787. The foundation enrollment increased for Erving from 220 to 241; it decreased for Leverett from 126 to 115, for New Salem-Wendell from 149 to 138, and for Shutesbury from 164 to 145. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending over this period decreased for Erving from 10.0 to 9.7 percent, for Leverett from 14.4 to 13.2 percent, and for Shutesbury from 29.9 to 27.0 percent; for New Salem-Wendell it increased from 41.3 to 41.7 percent.

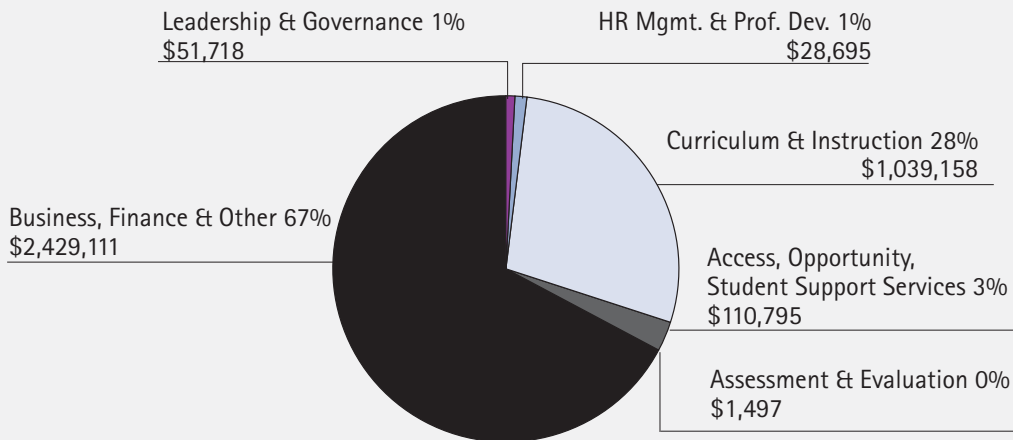
WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR ERVING SCHOOL UNION 28 PUBLIC SCHOOLS COME FROM?

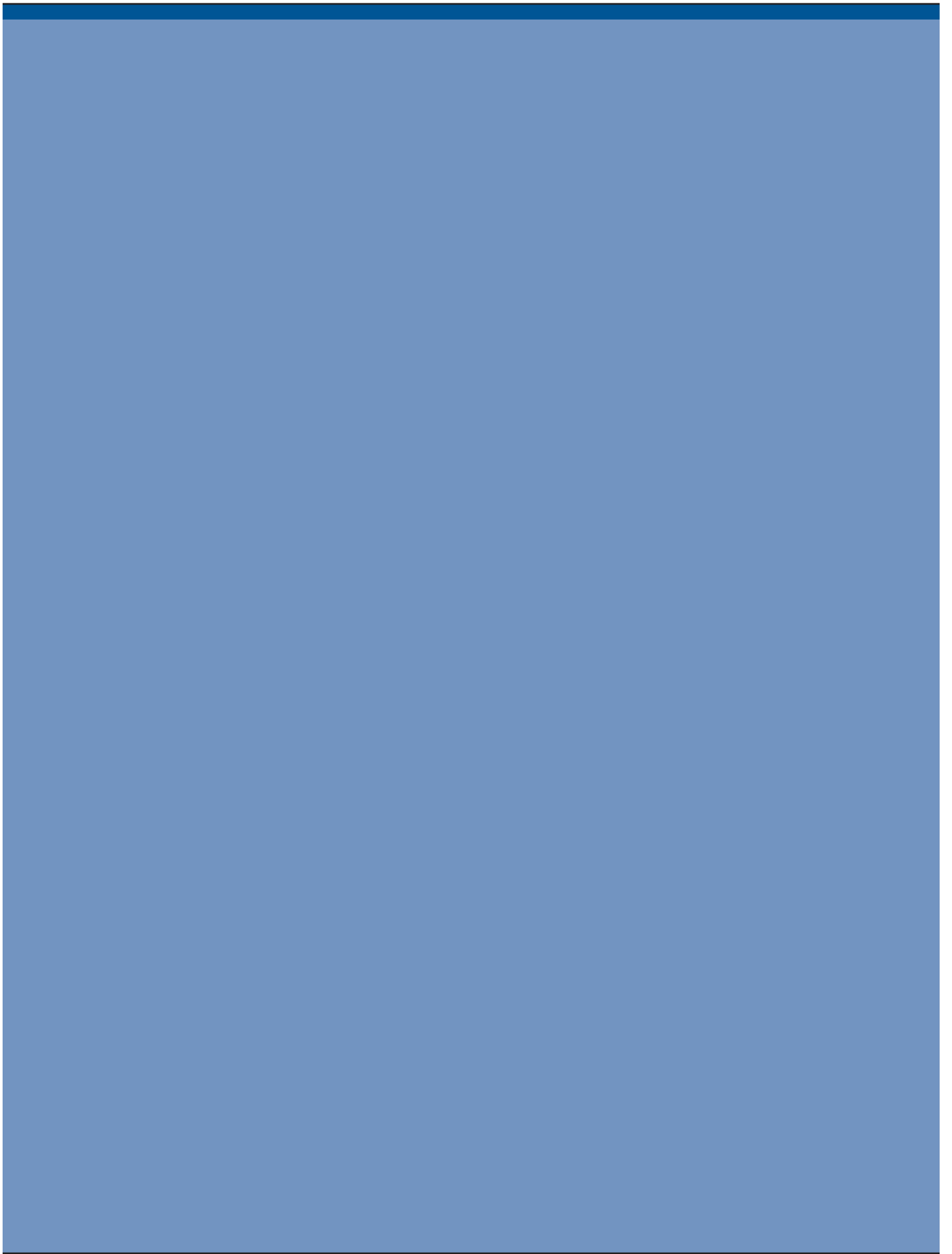


HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR ERVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALLOCATED?

FY05 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)

The data does not include expenditures for the remaining three districts





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